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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002350

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN ELECTIONS: Mayoral Race in Danli Too Close to Call

REF: Tegucigalpa X and previous

1. Summary: Emboffs met recently with the two leading mayoral candidates from Danli Municipality, Jorge Carcamo of the National Party and Luz Victoria Oliva Lobo of the Liberal Party. Danli is the second largest municipality in Honduras with 180,000 inhabitants. The Liberal Party has held power for the past 22 years. According to the primaries, there are 19,000 people registered with the Liberal Party and 9,000 with the National Party. Despite the disparity in numbers, the race now appears to be close. Both candidates view similar development issues as the key issues for the election. Mr. Carcamo has been in politics for 24 years, but has never formally held office; Ms. Lobo is new to politics but has worked for the government her entire career. Both believe their party will win. End Summary.

National Party Candidate

2. National Party candidate Jorge Carcamo owns several, large farms and holds a degree in agricultural engineering. His platform is based on economic development for the Danli area and improving education. Carcamo focused on unemployment and seeks more investment in the countryside, moving from subsistence farming to crop diversification and improved irrigation methods. He also seeks improved access to potable water.

3. Improving school infrastructure and increasing the number of young people in schools is an important goal for Carcamo. He stated that 40% of local children do not attend any school, and many of them go for the free lunch. He advocates for a public awareness campaign to convince rural parents of the importance of education for their children and for making the school vacation time coincide with harvest time. Women's issues, particularly helping single mothers with children who work on the street, are a priority for him also. In addition, he wants to create a "Virtual Library" for Danli youth to expand their horizons through the establishment of a free Internet program for local youth.

4. Carcamo promotes capacity building and giving the people the resources to address their own issues locally. He believes that the Liberal party is out of touch with the pueblo, that they don't understand nor have they met the needs of the people. He also believes that previous Liberal Party mayors have been corrupt and would review the books of previous administrations if elected. He wants an accounting of the 40,000,000 Lempira from taxes given to Danli last year by the national government.

Liberal Candidate

5. Luz Victoria Oliva Lobo is a retired Ministry of Education district director and holds a degree in rural development. Her platform focuses on specific plans for addressing the development problems of the Danli area. Quoting from a FUNDEMÓN document, in part financed by USAID, she spoke of concrete solutions for economic and environmental aspects of regional integration. Interestingly enough, her first statements were that the politicians of Danli had done many studies on what Danli needs, how to improve its situation, but then would ignore the findings and move on to do something different. (Comment: The previous administrations have all been liberal - her party. End Comment) She advocated the establishment of a local branch of the national university (UNAH - Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras) for technical education to advance local industrialization. She mentioned other possible avenues of technical training, such as the Zamorano Institute for Agriculture - but training for technicians not for engineers. She also focused on capacity building for local residents, including formal and non-formal education for community members. She is especially interested in capacity building of women and advocated that teachers to be better trained in teaching methodology and curriculum development.

6. Lobo focused on the importance of environmental protection for the area and suggested identifying a specific organically grown coffee niche market which is

environmentally friendly produced, and mentioned regional integration with Nicaragua to address environmental protection issues. Lobo also emphasized ecotourism to promote economic development through developing mountain climbing routes with nice haciendas for travelers.

17. She spoke of the strategic position of Danli, emphasizing the importance of connecting the area with roads to select port cities and the borders, providing adequate outlets for Honduran exports.

18. Lobo expects fraud in the upcoming election due to irregularities with voter identification. She alleges that the Registro Nacional de las Personas gave ID cards to National Party supporters, but destroyed the IDs of Liberal Party supporters. In addition, she mentioned that 1,317 voter applications were tampered with by removing photos. There is an ongoing investigation.

19. Both said crime and narco-trafficking are not issues in this local election.

10. Comment: Both candidates touched on similar issues. Caracamo's issues seemed much more concrete and focused on the actual issues and problems on Danli. He describes himself as a campesino. Caracamo's father was in politics for many years, Caracamo believes he has gained a good understanding of the issues. He is practical and appears to have a good grasp of the issues, but he does not have a strong platform on how to solve them. As with many National party members in this election, he appears confident that he will win. Though Lobo is new to politics, her background in education and rural development make her a strong candidate. She has macro economic solutions to local problems but with a large price tag and a long timeline. Although she describes herself as part of the pueblo, she does not appear to be as closely in touch with the area or its people as Caracamo. The numbers from the primary suggest that the Liberal Party will win; however, Caracamo's growing popularity could make this a close race. Interestingly, when asked if she thought she would win, Ms. Lobo was much more hesitant and said that due to the numbers she should win. It will be interesting contest - especially to see if the general public apathy and the Nationalist Party's ability to mobilize its voters do indeed hand them an upset victory. End Comment.

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